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“A New Lawn Grass for Coastal Locations”

Watch for a new turfgrass to come on the market within a year or two. Seashore paspalum is causing excitement among some turf researchers in the South. Unlike most of the lawn grasses that we grow in yards along the Gulf Coast, seashore paspalum is native to tropical and subtropical regions world-wide.

It grows naturally in coastal environments, often found in brackish marshes and close to ocean waters. In trials at the West Florida Research and Education Center in Santa Rosa County, paspalum looks great so far. Because the turf is of such high quality, I have difficulty distinguishing it from some of the research plots containing hybrid bermudas and zoysias that are also under trial there. The University of Georgia has the largest collection and testing program. More than 300 ecotypes of this species have been assembled. Seashore paspalum does not produce viable seed and it therefore must be planted as sod, plugs or sprigs.

This grass, like any other has both advantages and disadvantages. On the good side, it has excellent tolerance to saline or recycled water and can even tolerate sea water salt levels. It has good drought tolerance under proper management; tolerates low fertility levels; has minimal pesticide requirements and has excellent wear tolerance. Though it is a warm season grass, it goes off-color and into winter dormancy later than other grasses.

The disadvantages include a tendency to produce moderate amounts of thatch during periods of active growth; poor performance under tree shade and it greens up slightly later than most of the currently used warm season lawn grasses.

There are currently 3 cultivars in the trade for commercial or residential landscape use. “Sea Isle 1” was released by the University of Georgia in 1999. It is a fine-leaved dense growing selection intended for use in lawns or for athletic use in fairways or sports fields. It produces dark green, dense grass with excellent salt

tolerance and good tolerance to drought and wear.

Salam and ET were released in the 1990s from Southern Turf/Ecoshores in Punta Gorda, Florida. They are suited for athletic, golf course and landscape use, having qualities similar to Sea Isle 1.

There are about 6 commercial sod growers that are rushing to reproduce enough of this grass to meet the demand. The supply is expected to be low for a couple of years.

Anyone interested in trying seashore paspalum should do some homework before making an investment. The maintenance requirement of this grass, though not higher than other grasses, is specific in some instances. Mowing and fertilization of paspalum, for example, is not the same as for St. Augustine or even centipede. There is an official Seashore Paspalum Website where more in-depth information can be obtained: www.griffin.peachnet.edu/cssci/turf/paspalum/paspalum.htm.

Your local Florida Extension office also has information in the form of a fact sheet concerning this newly introduced turfgrass. It is Circular 1244, *Seashore Paspalum for Florida Lawns*. It can also be downloaded and printed from the web. Go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> and search.

Note: Please check out our Santa Rosa County website at www.co.santa-rosa.fl.us. The Extension Service is one of the departments featured. For gardening information, click on horticulture. While on the site, click on “our acre” and follow the adventures of a local farm family as they struggle to produce a cotton crop in spite of the drought.